

A University in Transition: Changes Since Submission of the Institutional Proposal

San Diego State University submitted its [Institutional Proposal](#) to WASC in October 2001 and it was accepted in December 2001. The proposal, written during a time of transition for WASC, took into account both the emerging guidelines and the previous WASC focus on compliance and accountability. In order to involve faculty, staff, and students and to engage in a process that was open, inclusive, and grounded in a culture of inquiry and evidence, President Weber appointed a [WASC Coordinating Committee](#) in the summer of 2002. This committee, comprised of 20-22 faculty, staff, administrators, and students, began meeting in August of the same summer.

Our work began with a [two-day retreat](#) followed by frequent campus meetings. In the first several months, the Committee worked to understand the new WASC processes and also began to focus more on questions and less on compliance, more on inquiry and the use of evidence and less on issues of accountability. Our aim was to develop a Capacity and Preparatory Review that not only demonstrated that we met the four WASC standards but also one that clearly identified salient institutional issues to be explored in-depth during the Educational Effectiveness phase of re-accreditation. Consequently, the Committee looked at the history of the institution, at the major forces that have shaped who we are and who we are becoming, and at the institutional challenges we face.

Through this work the Coordinating Committee developed a [Working Paper](#) as an addendum to the Institutional Proposal. This Paper identified three major issues on which we wished to focus: a) student learning; b) the balance among access, retention, and graduation; and c) the integration of undergraduate students into research activities and the impact of such activities on learning outcomes. These issues provide the link between the Institutional Proposal, the Capacity and Preparatory Review, and the Educational Effectiveness Report.

Student Learning. Student learning is our central purpose as a University and it is critical that students graduate with the knowledge, skills, and abilities they should have upon graduation. Today's world has become increasingly diverse, technological, and complex and our learning outcomes will play a critical role in ensuring that our graduates can become successful citizens. The re-accreditation process allows us to examine our practices and programs for the role they play in improving student learning.

Access, Retention, and Graduation. Like all higher education institutions in California, SDSU is experiencing enrollment pressures while concomitantly facing severe budgetary reductions. In response, SDSU has implemented a number of practices to serve our students within our resource constraints. Two of these practices, enrollment management and improved preparation of entering first-year and transfer students have had positive effects. While both retention and graduation rates have been increasing, we have much to do, especially in regard to graduation rates. The re-accreditation process affords us the opportunity to examine the impact of our current policies and procedures on access, retention, and graduation rates of all our students.

Undergraduate and Graduate Education. And third, San Diego State University has integrated into its historic teaching mission an expanding emphasis on research. This changing emphasis is evidenced in the increase in graduate degree programs and particularly joint-doctoral programs, the profiles of recently hired faculty, and the trajectory of increases in research funding by faculty. This increase in research productivity provides numerous opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to engage in research, yet it also means that faculty roles are changing. The re-accreditation process allows us to examine the extent to

which undergraduate students are engaged in research activities and the impact these activities have on student learning.

The three themes we have selected to guide our thinking as we prepare the Educational Effectiveness Report are central to our institutional mission. The most recent challenges brought on by the California budget crisis have, and will, inevitably impact us. However, the Capacity and Preparatory Review demonstrates that we have the capacity to make adjustments to the unavoidable ebb and flow of financial support from the state of California while continuing to make progress toward our institutional goals.

Introduction

The Capacity and Preparatory Review is organized around a series of essays. These essays have been written to achieve two purposes. First, the essays align with the WASC standards and demonstrate that SDSU fulfills the core commitment to institutional capacity. Second, they allow us to reflect on how our core commitment to capacity shapes our institutional approach to the three challenges identified as the most pressing for SDSU. It is these challenges that we will explore in-depth and return to in the Educational Effectiveness Report as we reflect on our progress toward becoming a learning organization.

Standard 1, “Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives,” is addressed in two essays. The first essay, “From the Revolving Door to the Corridor to Graduation,” describes changes in policies, procedures, and organization that have taken place to address the issues of access, retention, and graduation. In the Educational Effectiveness Report we will return to these issues to examine the effectiveness of our policies and programs. The second essay, “Expanding Our Horizons: Educating Students for the Global Community” describes three initiatives that illustrate our commitment to student engagement in local and global communities.

Standard 2, “Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions,” is addressed in two essays, “The Learning-Centered University” and “Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity.” Essay 2a describes our capacity to examine student learning in the General Education program and our majors while Essay 2b describes our capacity to examine the integration of undergraduate students into research activities and the effect of these activities on student learning. Both of these essays are linked to topics we will discuss further in the Educational Effectiveness Report.

Standard 3, “Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability” is also addressed in two essays, “Using Our Resources Wisely” and “An Organization Built Upon Shared Governance.” These essays illustrate our progress in using planning processes to achieve our institutional goals. The 1997 WASC Site Visit Report cited planning and governance as two areas meriting attention.

Standard 4, “Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement,” is addressed in two final essays. The first essay, “Shifting to a Culture Based on Evidence,” describes the alignment of Academic Plans and Academic Reviews, two processes used in examining the academic excellence of our programs. This essay also describes the reorganization of the Division of Student Affairs and its commitment to create a structure that supports student learning. The second essay, “Assessing Writing Competency and Proficiency,” describes the changes that have taken place in the assessment of writing competency and proficiency at both matriculation and the upper division level.

Each of the essays has been written in reference to a particular standard. Yet their complexity invites cross-references to other standards. To assist the reader, we have listed the specific Standard, Criteria for Review, and Questions for Institutional Engagement that are relevant to each essay. Within each essay we have also embedded links to additional information. A concluding essay summarizes our findings in regard to our capacity and readiness for the Educational Effectiveness phase. The appendices contain the Required Data Elements tables, the Stipulated Policies, additional evidence relevant to each of the four standards, and our response to the last WASC visit.